

## Keeping environmental education alive through hands on experience

By ZACHARY MESECK  
The Evening Sun

SHERBURNE – Rogers Environmental Education Center made 2019 a year of success by keeping kids in the outdoors, hosting education seminars, and advocating for education through partnerships with local schools.

According to Rogers Environmental Education Center Executive Director Simon Solomon, the center's goal is to provide outstanding educational opportunities that excite, inspire, and motivate people of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds to understand, appreciate, and protect our natural environment.

"Our overarching goal is to continue to save, keep open and accessible the Rogers Environmental Education Center," said Solomon. "Our non-profit business has adapted to still being fairly new in the business world."

"Having stepped up to the plate in 2011 to operate the Center after New York State closed the facility in December 2010, everything was new."

The Rogers Center is located at 2721 State Hwy.



Friends of Rogers Intern Katie McLaughlin, Executive Director Simon M. Solomon, Director of Development Heather Calkins, and Senior Environmental Educator Marissa Nolan. (Photo by Zachary Meseck)

80 in Sherburne, and can be seen by following the path down to the Visitor Center and visit the Center during normal business hours are Wednesday through Sunday.

Solomon said the property however is open and accessible 365 days a year from dawn to dusk.

Rogers Center encompasses more than 6 miles of hiking and skiing trails, has interpretive exhibits both

inside Visitor Center and on the grounds in addition to a cabin that houses multiple species of birds and raptors.

According to Solomon, a group of volunteers from Friends of Rogers was tasked with operating the Rogers Center if they wanted the organization to stay open and accessible and, "by golly they moved full steam ahead."

"During the past eight years a lot has been learned

and a lot has been taught by our educators, while at the same time the community have been overly supportive of our goals, that being to continue to operate Rogers Center and to protect it from state closure," he said. "Major challenges continue to be the funding of operations."

"With program and staff expansion comes additional expenses which we must con-

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## Chenango SPCA makes adoption easier than ever in 2020



Above: Shelter Manager Kathy Wyder and Executive Director Annette Clarke stand with Harrison the cat. Harrison is just one of many cats available for adoption at the Chenango SPCA. Currently you can adopt Harrison, or any other pet, at no cost to you thanks to the Safe Haven Fund for Animals. (Photo by Catherine Sasso)

At right: Mork is a one-year-old chihuahua who has been at the SPCA since September of last year. With handsome features and an adorable name to match, Mork hopes to find someone to bring him out of his shell. (Submitted Photo)



By CATHERINE SASSO  
The Evening Sun

Adoption from the Chenango Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (CSPCA) will be easier than ever in 2020.

The organization is closely following their mission statement which is "to provide and promote care, compassion, and respect for our animals in our community."

"I honestly will say that our animals are the healthiest they've ever been," said Executive Director Annette Clarke, "We're proactive, we take care of things early on so they don't become problematic."

The CSPCA has come a long way from 10 years ago when Clarke states they were euthanizing 70 percent of the animals that came through the door.

"In the last five years we've turned ourselves around and now were a no-kill shelter," says Clarke.

They have also began the new year by making adop-

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## In Your Own Words

Ruth Roberts,  
LCSW-R  
Chenango County Director of  
Community Services

Every family has its own identity, traditions and even rules. Together they become part of the mindset and culture of a family. At times rules are spoken about openly, but they might also remain unspoken. Regardless, everyone in the family has a clear understanding about the family rules and expectations. I want to share two of the rules (not in ranking order) I grew up with in my family.

Rule number, never waste food. Clearly a spoken rule but an approving or disapproving look from a parent might fall in the unspoken category. This of course was because both my parents grew up during the Depression and when they eventually had their own children they naturally brought that rule into their family. There were variations on this theme including "waste not, want not" and "take good care of what you have". My parents and many in their generation were way ahead of their time. They were environmentalists - Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. Nothing useful gets thrown out and if you don't need it, give it to someone who does. They were minimalists. Simple living, without the hazards and headaches that often come with accumulating a lot of stuff in this world.

Rule number two, serving others is the highest calling in this world. This rule was a spoken and unspoken rule. The expectation was that it be practiced within the family as well as outside the family. One spinoff of this rule would be what is known as the Golden Rule - Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Treat people in this world the way you would want to be treated if you were in their shoes. I was fortunate to have parents who provided a safe and loving home for their four children. One of the greatest gifts my parents gave us was the example of how they lived their life and rule number two was a dominant theme throughout.

My dad's serving capacity was more clearly defined in his role as a minister yet he much preferred to be called Pastor. He was a quiet and serious man with a tender heart. Outside the pulpit he was a man of few words but a very good listener. He always seemed to connect and communicate acceptance and was fascinated to get to know people who were very different from him.

My mother had a different way of serving. She had the uncanny ability to find people who needed something - food, shelter, clothing or a bit of encouragement and support. She was a magnet for individuals and animals who were often considered to be misfits, undesirables or somehow in need. We were never sure if my mother had magical radar that allowed her to zero in on these folks or if people and animals had special ways of finding her. Doesn't really matter at this point but growing up I witnessed thousands of acts of kindness.

It was not unusual to have extra people at the dinner table. Maybe known but also strangers. Probably because of rule number one, there was enough to share yet my mother was also a strong believer in what we now

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 continue to find ways to pay for. We are of course a mission driven organization and must be able to present on the environment while at the same time supporting day to day needs such as heating, lights, insurances, staff, etc.”

He said the organization receives support from a variety of sources including hardworking volunteers and local foundations.

“Cornell Cooperative immediately comes to mind; this specific organization has been very supportive of me personally and Rogers since day number one in working through our daily and annual operations, to helping spearhead program creations such as

our Selleck Sugaring Maple Syrup initiative that we can now say has completed its first year of 250 gallons of syrup produced with 75 percent having been sold.

Solomon said another partnership exists with the Sherburne-Earlville School District and the busing of our summer camp kids to Rogers camp from Norwich tied into their early morning summer school program.

The Place “YPC” Youth Philanthropy Council, Ann Coe and Run Chenango’s “Wild Goose Chase 5K Trail Run” to HBA, Colgate University and their Upstate Institute, are all examples of community partnerships as well.

He said the Rogers Center benefits from being

one of the only environmental education centers in Chenango County with a no-charge price point.

“I think many of us are acutely aware of the struggle’s local nonprofits face in Chenango County, it tends to come down to demographics, that’s why diversification is so very important,” he added. “The benefits of being based in Chenango County are that Rogers in particular is a jewel of the community, one that adds to the mystique of living in the region we do.”

“Rogers wouldn’t function too well in suburbia, although many nature centers find a way to do so when faced with such a challenge, and what makes Rogers Center so special



According to Friends of Rogers representatives, this year’s Winter Living Celebration was one of the best yet, with high attendance and participation from the community. (Photo by Zachary Meseck)

is access to the outdoors, having a free ‘literally a no-charge’ facility to visit anytime of the year.”

He said in 2019 there were multiple projects completed including a New York State sponsored building renovation including sustainable bamboo floors installed throughout the upstairs and downstairs of the center. He added that there are also new art exhibits in the upstairs exhibit room with a new amplified speaker system throughout the building playing nature sounds from the outside of the building.

“We also had Eagle Scout Gabe O’Dell build an outside learning beehive

exhibit adjacent to the visitor center,” said Solomon. “We’ve also hired a new Director of Development Heather Tehan, and we’ve done some rebranding that was sponsored by New York State Parks and Trails.”

According to Solomon, the Friends of Rogers group that manages the Environmental Center continues to focus on the future and making the best environmental experience possible.

“With an approved 5-year strategic plan up and through 2023 and having already completed our first 5-year strategic plan from 2013-2018 we continue to make strong improve-

ments and advancements,” said Solomon. “Much of our focus is multileveled, from the development of diversified fundraising plans to the creation of an exhibit plan to enhance our built environment. The investments the community has made since 2011 really shows when you visit property from the multiple staff that now work in the center to the well maintained trails and property since my arrival in 2013.”

“Each and every person that visits Rogers Center has and will continue to marvel at what a special place it is for our Chenango County community.”



The Rogers Center has numerous exhibits and educational activities for attendees to participate in for free. (Photo by Zachary Meseck)

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## In Your Own Words

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refer to as "portion control" which allowed her to stretch the food budget. Our home was often host to stray college students during breaks when campuses were closed. Frequently these were people who just needed some temporary support, comfort and assistance.

And as for the stray animals, I've lost track of how many showed up on the back porch only to graduate to the basement without my dad's knowledge and a few eventually came upstairs to be a household pet. My mother had some type of arrangement with a local pet haven that would find homes for dogs and cats and they in turn would give the really sick or traumatized ones to my mother so she could nurse them to health.

For many years I've been a social worker. I did explore other vocational and professional options. My love of sewing and working with fabric and textiles almost took me into the design world. For a brief period in high school I wanted to learn how to work on cars and dreamed about building a business that catered specifically to women. Bring your car in and while

you wait for your vehicle to be serviced you could get your hair done, a manicure and a pedicure. I thought it was a great idea but was without any sort of business model. When I described it to my guidance counselor I was sternly instructed to get back to class and focus on my college applications.

I decided on Primary and Secondary Education, and after graduating from college I taught school for a couple of years but found myself much more interested in what was going on in my students' lives outside the classroom. Their family, their friends, their neighborhood and community. I had no idea there was an entire profession dedicated to working with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities within their environments to maximize health and wellness. Because of my increased interest in how my students were doing in life, someone along the way suggested I consider the field of Social Work. I did and I never looked back. I only have small regrets on those school snow days.

Since 2010 I have served Chenango County in my role as Director of Community

Services where I am responsible for the planning and monitoring of services in the three disability areas - mental health, substance abuse, and developmental disabilities. I often stumble when asked "So, what do you do?" I often laugh within because I don't know where to start and it's impossible to adequately answer and certainly not in any brief manner. So I will frequently respond by saying "I'm a public servant. I work for Chenango County." This will typically lead to additional questions but I've noticed that describing myself as a public servant sometimes throws the conversation and I'm not sure why.

For me, I make no apologies. I'm honored to be a public servant and very proud to serve Chenango County. I am most pleased about having the opportunity to work with many others throughout the state, region and county to ensure there are services and supports for individuals and their family members who are dealing with a mental health condition, a substance abuse problem and/or developmental disability. In my heart I fervently believe in the importance of the work we do and I

believe our communities are stronger and healthier when individuals who have a mental disability are fully participating as members in our communities.

Since arriving in Chenango County much has happened. We've had to aggressively respond to the opioid crisis, we've witnessed unseen human struggling and we continue to see the devastating impact of generational poverty. But it's also important to note the good things that have occurred and continue to take place. There are groups made up of concerned and caring citizens who have voluntarily come together and mobilized in effort to address many health and social problems. We've made significant progress in the area of educating the public and increasing awareness about behavioral health conditions and suicide prevention. We now have the Chenango Substance Abuse Coalition and the Chenango County Suicide Prevention Coalition that regularly meets to take on difficult topics and tasks. We're offering trainings in Mental Health First Aid to anyone who is interested. We've expanded mental health services into the

schools where we've been able to engage several hundreds of children, youth and their families in prevention and treatment efforts.

I'm reminded of the words of the anthropologist Margaret Mead. She wrote "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Rule number one and Rule number two have withstood the test of time. My parents were right. In order to not waste food I've created some very interesting "Refrigerator Meals" by simply taking stock of leftovers, what I have in my pantry and Voila! Call it dinner. Unfortunately (or fortunately in some cases) these meals can rarely be replicated. Just ask my husband and kids. And as for rule number two, whether it be volunteerism or a career in a helping profession; whether it is done privately or publicly; and while it might not be the most glamorous, prestigious or even financially rewarding type of work - serving others remains the highest calling in this world.

## Ruth Roberts, LCSW-R



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# Chenango SPCA makes adoption easier than ever in 2020 —

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tion free to all approved applicants.

The Safe Haven Fund for Animals is a donor-driven fund that covers all costs associated with pet adoption, making it totally free to adopt from the CSPCA. This includes the cost of spay or neuter, vaccinations, and adoption fees.

Shelter manager and licensed veterinary technician Kathy Wyder said, "A dog could be up to \$250, and that could be expensive for someone to put out even if you're doing okay. We might get more adopters from more places to get these animals in quicker and out quicker and we have to hope for that in 2020."

According to the shelter, this fund is the biggest breakthrough for the CSPCA since they become a no-kill shelter.

Because the shelter has transformed to no-kill, they are seeing a major increase in the number of cats they have on site. The shelter can comfortably hold about 120 cats. However they are consistently over that number by 10 to 20 cats.

Suggestions to expand the shelter have been considered, but



Meet Ren. This beautiful two-year-old girl has been staying at the CSPCA for over half her life. She can be found lounging in the Cat Sculpture room. (Submitted Photo)

Clarke raises a valid point. "We have talked about making additions to the building, but of course the old saying goes build it and they will come. We are trying to get animals out, not take more in. The priority is really to get people to do the right thing and to have their animals spayed and neutered, the over-population of animals has gotten out of hand."

They also have a waitlist with 200 strays waiting to be surrendered to the shelter. The CSPCA offers assistance

to those caring for strays who are on the waitlist. They supply food, litter pans, shelters, and blankets until the SPCA can take them in. The shelter also offers assistance and guidance to owners who are trying to surrender their pets in hopes of helping pet owners keep their pets.

The shelter reports that one of the biggest causes of animal over population is the lack of owners spaying and neutering their pets.

"One kitten and their offspring can generate 7 million cats. They can

start as early as 6 months old and can get pregnant with the next litter while they're still nursing the first. I have people who say, well my cat should experience motherhood or I don't want my dog neutered because it takes away his manhood. That kind of thinking has got to change because that is exactly why we have the over-population of pets," said Clarke.

Wyder said that getting your animals fixed can also help prolong their life. Spaying your cat can help prevent uterus infections while

neutering can prevent prostate cancer.

On a positive note, people are reclaiming their cats more this year than years prior.

"We used to never have owners come in for their cats. I can't tell you how many have gone home because we put them on Facebook, I put the street where they were. We have their photos out there and they're getting reclaimed. We never had this happen before," said Wyder.

The CSPCA offers many programs to aid the community in caring for their pets such as the Full Bellies Pet Food pantry. The food pantry offers pet food to low-income community members who receive state benefits.

They also provide the Kerby Free program, which is a donor driven medical emergency fund that helps people pay the cost of unforeseen medical bills, as well as the Flea program, which assists low-income families with flea prevention by providing topical flea treatment as a discounted cost.

The CSPCA will also bring kittens to company offices for a "kitty hang out session" to help staff

de-stress.

"It's been proven that workers who have that kind of healthy break even if it's short term, will go back and be more productive," said Clarke, "Where we're heading is to make ourselves an essential part of this community and let people know where here for them, were here for their animals."

The CSPCA is funded solely through grants and community donations. The daily operating cost is \$1,000 a day. Clarke says that the community has been wonderful in supporting the SPCA through various fundraisers and donation drives. The CSPCA is always in need of financial support, but they also appreciate in kind donations as well. Some things that are always needed are office supplies, cat litter, cleaning supplies, and enrichment items for the animals.

The CSPCA is looking forward to a year of healthy animals, informative education, and positive community connection.

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- 2) All paper dry & free of plastic
- 3) In the right bin

- #1 – see through plastic = #1 PETE
- #2 – colored plastic jugs & bottles = #2 HDPE Colored
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- #5 – tubs = #5 PP
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\* Waxy or plastic coated cardboard is garbage.

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